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When Dianne Johnson channel-surfs for news in her rural western Nebraska home, all she sees are stories about Colorado crime and car crashes from a Denver television station more than 200 miles away. It's frustrating for the 61-year-old rancher, who wants to know the latest developments in Nebraska politics and sports. When floods devastated huge swaths of Nebraska this year, Johnson struggled to keep tabs on what was happening. "If we actually had local news, we would watch it," she said. "But all we get is Colorado drug busts and stories about who got murdered in Denver. It has nothing to do with us."

Johnson is among an estimated 870,000 households nationwide that receive at least one distant network affiliate's feed from their satellite TV service providers because they don't live close enough to get conventional over-the-air signals. With no local TV news stations and a dwindling number of newspapers, many rural Americans are finding it increasingly difficult to track local elections or government decisions that affect their lives. "It's your connection to what's going on in your community," said Jim Timm, president and executive director of the Nebraska Broadcasters Association.

Johnson's plight is part of a congressional dispute pitting local broadcasters against satellite television providers, who are frequently the only option for viewers in America's most remote corners. Caught in the middle are the nation's "neglected markets" — remote areas that can't get local broadcast signals, forcing viewers to rely on satellite service that shows them news from other states. Two of the 12 "neglected markets" are in Nebraska, in regions with several of the nation's least-populated counties. The others are in rural corners of Kentucky, Texas, Wyoming, Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, Montana, Maine and Michigan. For many of those areas, two separate issues are at play.

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**Pittsburgh Post-
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**Editorial: Allow a
vote, Mr. Turzai –
Blocking municipal
consolidation is bad
policy**

The first is a federal law that lets satellite providers import distant broadcast signals to those “neglected markets” at a steep discount, even though the local news subscribers see may not be relevant. In western Nebraska, satellite subscribers might see news from Rapid City, South Dakota, or Denver, which are often geographically closer than Nebraska’s largest cities, Omaha and Lincoln. Others who subscribe to AT&T-owned DirecTV end up watching news, weather and commercials from a Los Angeles network affiliate, even though there are local stations much closer to home, in North Platte and Scottsbluff, Nebraska. “Instead of a tornado hitting the ground in North Platte, they’re hearing about sunny beaches in L.A.,” said Shannon Booth, a general manager for Gray Television who oversees the company’s stations in Lincoln, Hastings and North Platte.

The law was initially passed in 1988 to help small, fledgling satellite TV providers compete with cable companies that were viewed as monopolies at the time. It’s set to expire at the year’s end, but satellite providers are lobbying Congress to extend it for another five years. Nebraska broadcasters who want their content beamed to those households say the law is outdated because satellite companies are much larger now and shouldn’t receive what amounts to a federal subsidy.

If the law does expire, satellite providers would no longer be able to send distant, out-of-state programming to rural viewers and would likely have to pay more because they’d be required to negotiate with local broadcast stations. Broadcasters could then expand into areas they don’t currently reach. Satellite TV providers argue that that law protects consumers by requiring broadcasters to negotiate in good faith over the fees that satellite companies are required to pay them for access to their shows. Even with the law in place, those fees have risen from \$215 million in 2006 to \$11.9 billion this year, according to the American Television Alliance, a satellite and cable TV industry group. The expense is often passed along to subscribers.

In a statement, AT&T said broadcasters “routinely hold consumers hostage” with television blackouts if satellite providers don’t agree to pay the rising fees. A company spokesman pointed to a Federal Communications Commission ruling last month that ordered a group of broadcast stations to go back to the bargaining table with AT&T, concluding that the stations hadn’t negotiated in good faith.

Cable and satellite providers are under financial pressure because customers have been dropping them for cheaper streaming services. Local broadcasters are still generally profitable, but they also face declining viewership and stagnant advertising. “Nothing prevents local broadcasters from investing in their local communities, extending the reach of their signals and providing these customers free, over-the-air signals,” Rob Thun, an AT&T executive, said in testimony last month to the Senate Commerce Committee.

Booth, though, said doing so would be practically impossible because it would require federal approval, and for nearly a decade, the FCC has prohibited stations from expanding their transmission facilities or constructing new TV translators that would widen their reach. The second challenge for rural viewers is a federal law that sets the boundaries for the nation’s media markets. In Nebraska, 16 rural counties are in the Denver or Rapid City media markets, based on a

map drawn by Nielsen Media Research. Despite being in Nebraska, satellite television subscribers in those markets only get news from Colorado or South Dakota-based stations.

Counties can appeal to the Federal Communications Commission for access to Nebraska-based news, but the process is complicated and time-consuming, said Jordan Dux, director of national affairs for the Nebraska Farm Bureau, which has followed the issue. Legislation sponsored by Nebraska Sen. Deb Fischer and Rep. Adrian Smith would create an exemption that would give their constituents access to news out of Scottsbluff. But the measure's prospects are unclear. "There's a level of frustration out there in areas of Nebraska that don't have access to these local channels," Dux said.

Dux said many of his group's members aren't happy that they can't get news coverage of the Nebraska Legislature. Most legislative hearings and debates are live-streamed on the internet, but Dux said some Farm Bureau members don't have access to high-speed connections. It's a major hassle for Jeff Metz, a fourth-generation farmer and rancher from Angora, Nebraska, whose nearest neighbor is four miles away.

Metz, 53, relies on satellite television coverage but the closest local stations he can get are from Denver, nearly 175 miles away. Metz said he'd like to follow Nebraska legislative news, weather, and local cattle and commodity markets, but the out-of-state stations don't offer any coverage. His local newspaper has gotten smaller and more expensive, but Metz said he feels fortunate to have anything at all. "I don't care if it's snowing in Denver," Metz said. "People like to know what's going on locally." – **Associated Press**

Atlantic Broadband recently was informed by the owner of broadcast station WJAC-TV, Johnstown, that it was establishing a local CW station to serve the Johnstown-Altoona area. In accordance with the rules which govern "in-market" stations, Atlantic Broadband is required to carry this local station, said Andrew Walton, Atlantic Broadband spokesman.

The programming on this CW station substantially duplicates that which is found on WPCW-Pittsburgh. As a result, Atlantic Broadband notified its subscribers last month that the CW channel closer to our service area would replace the more distant CW station from Pittsburgh, effective Nov. 12, Walton said. The change leaves customers in the Altoona area without some popular programs such as a sports talk show with Bob Pompeani and pre- and post-game Pittsburgh Steelers programming. "Lots of sports fans locally are outraged by this turn of events," wrote Kathie Richardson of Hollidaysburg in an email to the Mirror.

Rich DeLeo of Altoona is a regular caller to Pompeani's show but said he wasn't aware of the change because he has Dish Network. Walton said channel changes are made from time to time. "In this case, we were required to carry the 'in-market' CW station," he said. "Feedback received has been at normal levels typical with this kind of change, with customers understanding that most of the programming is the same, as both are CW channels." Walton said.

CW Pittsburgh is owned by the CBS Television Stations subsidiary of CBS Corp., as part of a duopoly with Pittsburgh-licensed CBS owned-and-operated station KDKA-TV. KDKA-TV director of programming Mike Karas did not respond to email and voice mail messages seeking comment. — ***Altoona Mirror***

Allegheny County's state-of-the-art 911 center is where more than a dozen dispatchers respond to thousands of calls daily. When they dispatch an ambulance or police to a scene, most times they do so on a spectrum of the radio system known as the T-band. "That frequency gives us the capability to communicate with all of the first responders countywide," said Allegheny County EMS Chief Matt Brown.

But according to federal law, the T-band is set to be auctioned to the highest bidder in a little more than a year. It's forcing Allegheny County and departments across the country to find a new way to operate their 911 systems. "That could involve 50-60 new radio towers that don't exist today," said Brown. "That whole process of obtaining permits for those spaces and having them installed. The funding for that would be well over \$250 million." That's money Brown says the county doesn't have, likely requiring help from taxpayers to foot the bill. The Federal Communications Commission is in charge of selling the T-band, but officials recently raised concerns to Congress.

A recent report from the Government Accountability Office showed that the FCC "concluded that all t-band auction scenarios would fail." Officials also told Congress "The agency will conduct the auction unless the law is amended." Congressman Mike Doyle, D-Forrest Hills, said selling and replacing it would end up costing significantly more than leaving it in place and said that is something the GAO report made clear. "Where does Allegheny County come up with a quick \$250 million to replace the T-band?" said Rep. Doyle. "If we don't have the money to replace the T-band, how does that degrade our response times?"

Earlier this month, a bill to keep the T-band from being sold was introduced in Congress. But Brown doesn't have the luxury of taking a wait-and-see approach. "That process alone could take a year or so just to be able to figure out how to make it work," said Brown. — ***WPXI-TV, Pittsburgh***

Big tech companies such as Facebook Inc., Twitter Inc. and Google have benefited from enabling users to easily share pictures or videos, but they are now working to stem the spread of maliciously doctored content ahead of next year's presidential election. So-called deepfakes are images or videos that have been manipulated through the use of sophisticated machine-learning algorithms to make it almost impossible to differentiate between what is real and what isn't. While the technology has benign applications—Walt Disney Co. has used algorithms to insert characters in some of its "Star Wars" movies—it can be used to create nefarious content.

The tools to concoct fake images are improving so rapidly that soon it will be very hard to detect deepfakes with technology, said Dana Rao, executive vice president and general counsel for Adobe Inc., which is best known for its Photoshop image-editing software. The fight will be "an arms race," he said. The number of deepfakes online nearly

doubled from December to August, to 14,678, according to a study by cybersecurity startup Deeptrace. The rise has prompted action by tech giants.

Alphabet Inc.'s Google on Wednesday, in an update to its [political advertisement policy](#), said it would prohibit the use of deepfakes in political and other ads. Twitter earlier this month said it was considering identifying manipulated photos, videos and audio shared on its platform. "The risk is that these types of synthetic media and disinformation undermine the public trust and erode our ability to have productive conversations about critical issues," said Yoel Roth, Twitter's head of site integrity.

Facebook, Microsoft Corp. and Amazon.com Inc. are working with more than a half-dozen universities to run a [Deepfake Detection Challenge](#) starting next month. It is intended to accelerate research into new ways of detecting and preventing media manipulated to mislead others, Facebook Chief Technology Officer Mike Schroepfer wrote in a September blog post. Interest in making deepfakes is growing fast, according to Deeptrace. Two years ago the first deepfakes appeared on Reddit, the popular chat forum. Now, at least 20 websites and online forums are devoted to discussions about how to better produce them.

Deeptrace found online services that can generate and sell custom deepfakes in as little as two days and for a cost as low as \$2.99 a video, the researchers said. "It doesn't take a lot of skill," said Matt Turek, a program manager overseeing deepfake-related research and development efforts at the Pentagon's technology incubator, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. The Pentagon is studying deepfakes out of concern that military planners could be fooled into making bad decisions if altered images aren't detected.

Darpa has developed a prototype media forensics tool for use by government agencies to detect altered photos and video. It wants to develop additional technology to detect synthetic audio and fake text and identify the source and intent of any manipulated content. How companies deal with deepfakes is another point of conflict between tech companies and Washington. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) denounced Facebook earlier this year for its [refusal to take down a doctored video](#) of her. Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg, following the incident, said the company was [reviewing its policy](#) on deepfakes.

Republican Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas has co-sponsored legislation with Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D., Nev.) to boost research to identify such content manipulation. On Wednesday, Mr. Moran called deepfakes "a specific threat to U.S. voters and consumers by way of misinformation that is increasingly difficult to identify." Several startups have emerged to work on image verification, and now big tech companies, which have been criticized for not doing more to prevent disinformation, are getting more involved in the fight.

For example, Facebook has amassed more than 100,000 videos featuring actors that researchers can use to help develop and test systems to spot deepfakes. Facebook said its users' data isn't part of the research. Google has similarly built up a catalog to hone deepfake-detection research. This year the company assembled a trove of audio

clips to help researchers develop ways to identify fake speech that can be spliced into a video. Google also is drawing on its development of text-to-speech conversion tools to devise new ones that can help authenticate a speaker.

Adobe is taking a different approach. The company has developed a system that will allow authors and publishers to attach information to content, such as who created it and when and where. It is working with New York Times Co. and Twitter and will share the technology, which it envisions serving as industrywide system for authenticating content. Adobe said it would offer the authentication tool on its Photoshop editing software starting in 2020. Adobe expects most legitimate authors and creators to opt into the feature, while bad actors wouldn't, Mr. Rao said.

Elsewhere, the nonprofit arm of the AI Foundation, an advocacy group for the safe use of artificial intelligence, has created a website to help election campaigns and journalists analyze photos and videos within minutes of receiving them. The portal, called Reality Defender 2020, uses complex algorithms to detect pixel changes and other anomalies—such as in a candidate's mannerisms, mouth movements, face wrinkles and shadows—to detect alterations. It has drawn on research from dozens of academics. "There is no one silver bullet," said Rob Meadows, the AI Foundation's founder and chief technology officer. — **Wall Street Journal**

